

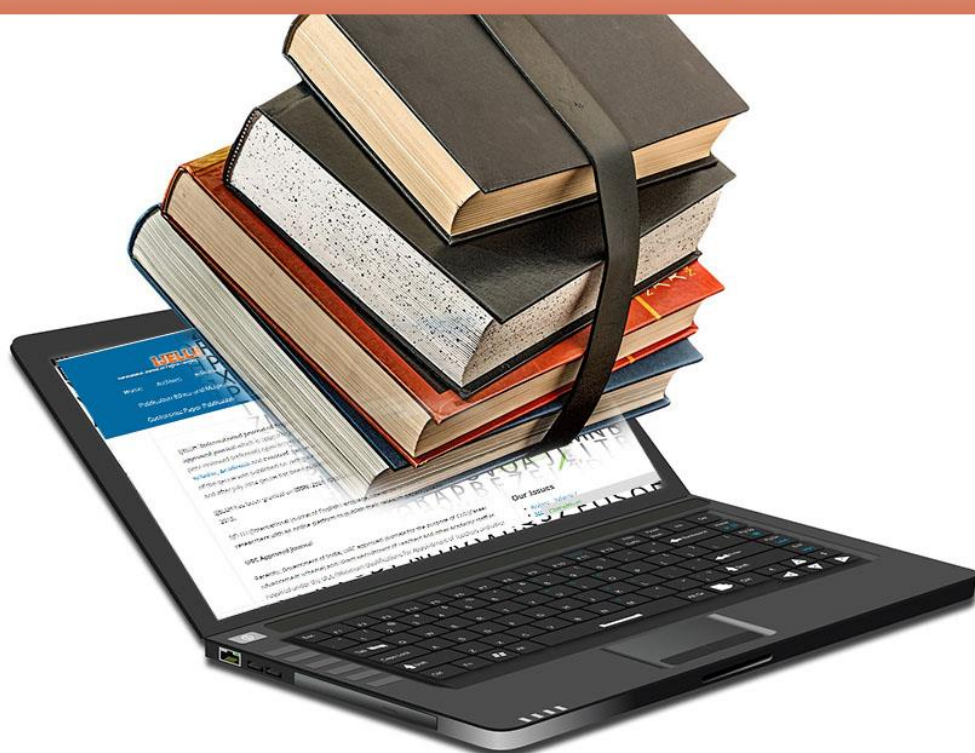
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### Emergence of Indian woman for freedom movement in Raja Rao's

#### *Kanthapura*

Raja Rao is one of the leading Indian authors in Indian Writing in English. He was born on 8 November 1908 in Hassan in the then Mysore state in south India in a well-known Brahmin family. He schooled in a Muslim school and completed degree from the Madras University. He left India for Europe and remained there for a decade and completed his post graduation in France studying at the universities of Montpellier and the Sorbonne and pursued his research in Christian theology and history. He married a French academician Camille Mouly in 1931 which did not last longer than even a decade and ended in 1939 then he returned to India and joined his first period of *ashram*. He travelled in India in search of spiritual heritage what was coincided with the World War II.

He has to his credit stories at first published in French and English and Kannada articles published in the then influential journal 'Jay Karnataka'. He also edited a literary magazine 'Tomorrow' for some days. *Kanthapura* was first published in English and later in French. The novel is considered to be the first classic modern Indian work of art based on Gandhian philosophy. Raja Rao finds himself in the protagonist of the fiction Moorthy in many terms. Both are from the Brahmin community, proceed to higher education in urban areas where influence of freedom movement and Gandhi's philosophy are and convinced by the both. In some respects in relations to Moorthy's freedom movement involvement are shared with in Okonkwo of VS Naipaul's *Things Fall Apart*.

*Kanthapura* is the first major Indian novel in English by Raja Rao. It deals with the Civil disobedience movement of 1930s in which participation of a small south Indian village in the national struggle calls for the story's central concern. The villagers sacrifice all their material possessions in a triumph of the spirit showing how the people of country united at the time of movement joined at the non-violence movement to bring independence from the British powers. Achakka narrates the story, she is an old village woman and story revolves around the village, religious rituals; Satyanarayan Puja; and celebration of festivals like Dussera, Diwali, Ganesh Jayanti, Sankara Jayanti, Kartik Purnima and the national issue of freedom following Mahatma Gandhi. The village is a witness of strong discrimination amongst Brahmin, Sudra and pariah communities still there is a mutual bonding in the villagers and live happily with equal social and economic friendliness Religion is imparted through discourses and pujas keeps alive in the natives as a sense of affinity between human beings.

*Kanthapura* is a name of the village where the plot of the novel revolves. It is a splendid creation, depicts very simple happenings day to day life of Kanthapura in vigorous manner. In his writing a clear picture of villagers are prominent. This village is a microcosm of the conventional Indian society with its entrenched caste hierarchy. There are clear demarcations and stratifications of caste in village as in whole of Indian social set up. There are Brahmin, Sudra, potter and Pariah. Kanthapura is one of the typical villages in India, split according to the stratification of caste system, hierarchical order being strictly maintained in their housing and areas. There are upper caste Brahmin quarters, pariah quarters, weaver quarters, potter quarters etc which are not supposed to cross over to Brahmin quarters. The village is observed maintaining caste belief in very strong manner at any cost.

There is number of female characters; from the female deity; village goddess Kenchamma to Ratna and many other minor characters. Achakka the narrator of story, Narsamma; mother of the protagonist, Rangamma; a kind lady and patron for all ritual celebrations, Ratna; a young

widowed daughter of Kamalamma, Rangamma's sister, Venkamma; a foul mouthed woman, a Pariah Rachana and many other female characters. Major parts of the fiction are shared by the female characters as and when Moorthy is out of action. When Moorthy is jailed Rangamma and Ratna take over the charge of celebrations and rituals to be performed during festivals and even the freedom movement actions. Rao does not marginalise the role of women in the freedom movement and highlights their individual contributions. Rangamma and Ratna form women's volunteer groups, despite opposition from the orthodox male who are also joined by even the low caste women at prudent efforts made by Moorthy.

Apart from the female characters, the story has two main characters; Mahatma Gandhi and Moorthy, the former remains out of the action throughout the novel, the latter sets out to spreading the Mahatma's message among the villagers. He returns from the city as a 'Gandhi Man'. At the outset, the villagers in particularly women start considering Moorthy seriously instead of whiling in something else. As he embarks upon various religious activities, he is first and foremost supported by Rangamma, Ratna and Range Gowda. They form a Congress committee in Kanthapura based on the Gandhian philosophy. Their activities are underestimated and ignored by the male in the village. The women are first to become his followers. Mixing up with the low castes of Moorthy is seriously objected by the upper caste people including women. Moorthy is so strongly influential on the women of village who dare not talk against him. It is also because he is strong willed, sincere and transparent in his approach in his actions, distrust and objection in his action is highly mortifying even for the women as they follow him as their leader that too voluntarily.

When Moorthy is put into jail for three months, Sankar, in his absence, takes over the movement assisted by Rangamma. The women form a Sevika Sangh, such a move is objected by their husbands because they think the women would neglect their daily chores. Actually his absence puts strength in their actions and willingness towards the cause of movement. As

Moorthy is released after three months he continues from where he discontinued forming formidable groups for Non-Cooperation movement, Dandi March and picketing the toddy shops. In all these activities, women form larger groups of the villagers. The villagers including women are mercilessly beaten by the British police. The police attack men and women in which one woman is raped and another delivers a child. This attack is all one-sided for the villagers remain passive agitators against the government. Similar suffering women in Bengali literature as well are witnessed but none perhaps daring to voice so vehement a protest as the women of Kanthapura. Many villagers including Moorthy are arrested and sent to jail. The war against the police is lost by the villagers. It culminates in wreaking havoc on Kanthapura. Another great leap towards liberation is achieved by the women in the novel by their deciding to read and comment on the vedantic texts when Ramakrishnayya dies which is prohibited. The women choose Ratna to read the texts and Rangamma to comment on them, a remarkable decision when one considers the contemporary furor over whether a woman at all has the right to read the Vedas or not. Apart from it, a widow is not supposed to read the Vedas. Rao's selection of an old grandmother as the narrator in *Kanthapura* is one of the finest stylistic devices of the novel. We witness the immense change that is gradually brought about in the psyche of the narrow-minded, prejudiced and uneducated widow as she mingles facts with fantasy to describe how the world changed for her and her companions under the influence of Moorthy's preaching and Rangamma's Sevika Sangha. This is one of the rare instances where history is looked at from a woman's point of view as opposed to its analytical, power-structured male version that inevitably leaves the women folk out. It is because of the Gandhian movement that we witness a considerable change in the portrayal of women in fiction.

The women who are left behind when others jailed decide to burn the village, rather than let the fields and houses fall into the hands of the oppressors (British Government). The village, therefore, is burned by the village women. There remains neither man nor mosquito in

Kanthapura. Then the journey begins to another village. They reach a place called Kashipura after going through many difficulties. They stay there. In the meanwhile, the Mahatma signs a treaty with the British government with which many non-violent men and women prisoners are released including Ratna who return to tell villagers at Kashipura the conditions inside the prisons and about their leader Moorthy.

As of the female narrator is concerned it is a medium for storytelling as well as a character in her own right, for she expresses her own radical nature and that of changing India. Though she tells the reader little directly of herself. She admits to owning seven acres of wet land and twelve of dry, it is clear from her mode of speaking that she is willing to accept fundamental social changes. Although she is respectful of Hindu tradition, she is not bound to old ways. She is caught up in all the turmoil and at times her breathless narration expresses the excitement of the period as well as her own recognition of a movement that is leading to India's autonomy.

To conclude with the comment on Raja Rao's fiction, "There is more to Raja Rao's book than a morality tale. It is written in an elegant style verging on poetry; it has all the content of an ancient Indian classic, combined with a sharp satirical wit and a clear understanding of the present." (New York Times) The feminine principal fundamental to the narrative while the novel does not explicitly question the then existing gender equations, it does tell us the rising importance of women in society and how that rising importance is both a cause and effect of the national movement. While subjects like equality and husband-wife relations have not been questioned, they have been commented upon. Most importantly it has been mentioned that the women of India played an active part in the India's struggle for independence, while they might not have been viewed as equals by men then, they were not treat with outright contempt either. *Kanthapura* is a path breaking work in many ways. It is Raja Rao's sensitive and realistic portrayal of the emergence of the modern Indian woman, a part of whom is carried within us even today and in future.

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